



BUILDING PEACE



**THE PROBLEM WITH
PARTNERSHIPS**

ACTION PACK:

Episode 2 - It starts in your mind



What to know:

The problem with our mindsets

“Many Global North actors continue to hold neo-colonial attitudes that have not been acknowledged or even recognised. This is seen by Global South actors as one reason for the failure of Global North actors to develop equitable partnerships.

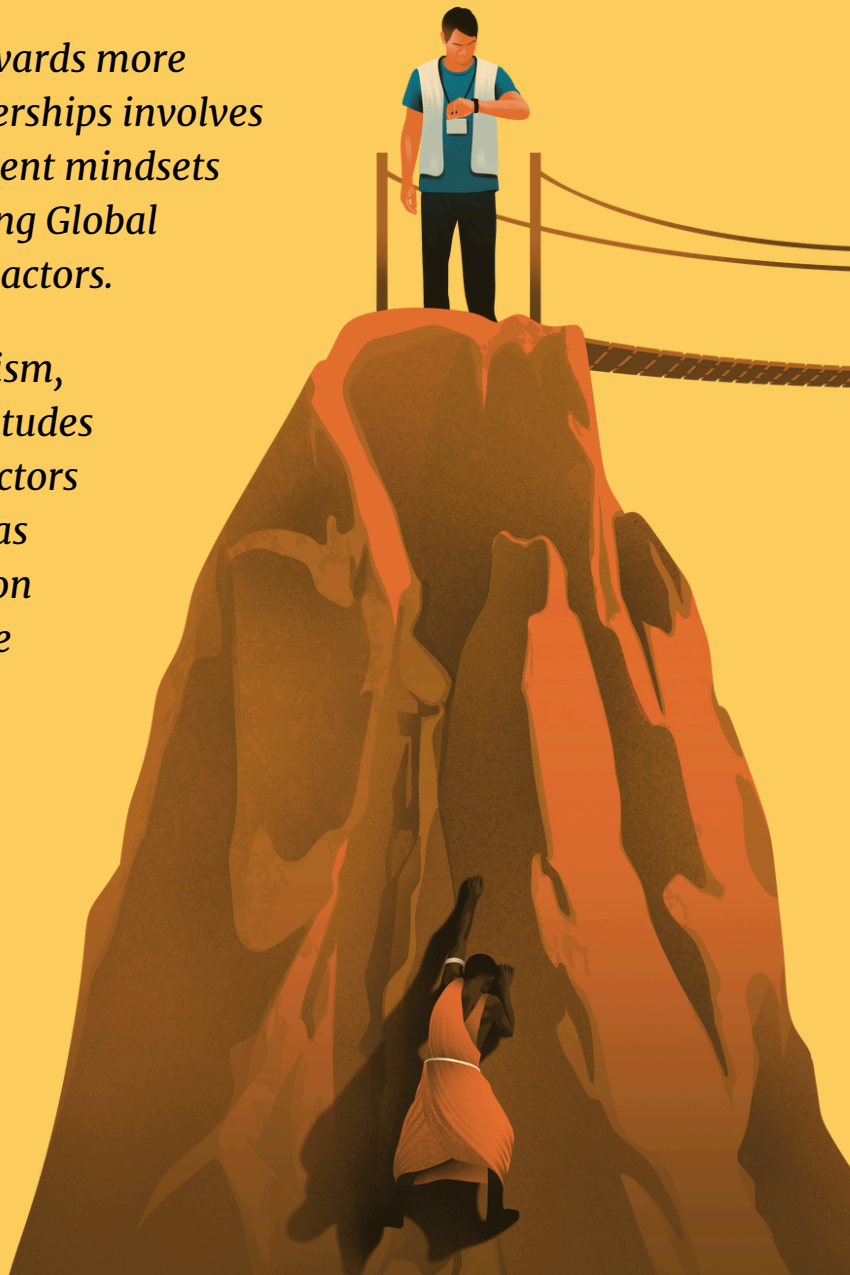
This is compounded by the reluctance of Global South actors to raise these issues for fear of losing funding.

These attitudes and behaviours undermine any prospect for more equitable partnerships.”

“A crucial building block towards more decolonised and equitable partnerships involves challenging and changing current mindsets and worldviews, both among Global North and Global South actors.

This includes addressing racism, elitism, and other harmful attitudes when viewing Global South actors and communities, as well as recognising and reflecting on power and privilege in the partnership itself.”

From Transforming Partnerships in
International Cooperation (2023)



What to know:

Mindsets are causing partnerships to fail

3. Racism and neo-colonialism

A third explanation for why international partnerships have failed is that Global North actors have deeply held neo-colonial attitudes, which haven't been acknowledged or even recognised by most of those actors. These attitudes, outlined in Peace Direct's *Time to Decolonise Aid* report, undermine any prospect of meaningful, equitable partnerships.

As Sara Torrelles Vives noted:

"For too long 'internationals' have assumed that they have something 'invaluable' to bring to the table and that without them (us) everything would work differently (sometimes used as a euphemism to refer to inefficiently). Not only are those assumptions racist, but they are based on ideas and perceptions that are deeply rooted in colonialist and patriarchal mindsets, which unfortunately permeate the sector to this day."

In a follow-up interview, Christiane Essombe went further, suggesting that:

"[...] there ought to be an understanding that international actors are not doing a favour or 'helping' but instead contributing to addressing an issue that they are not immune to themselves, given how interconnected the contemporary world is. [...] with respect to money and donors, I believe it is high time to decolonise that concept. The aid sector should question how that capital was accumulated in the first place and which racist colonial hierarchies it still funds to this day. Having that genealogy outlined is critical for an informed use of that capital and the establishment of mutually beneficial relations between all actors."

Global South actors have also been reluctant to raise the issue of neo-colonialism and systemic racism for fear of losing funding and risking being seen as troublemaker. As Aïcha Madi noted, that compounds the impact on those who do speak up:

"I think that if only a few local actors and small organisations report and criticise the problem of neo-colonisation in the international aid sector, they risk being blacklisted and won't have the opportunity to get funding and do their important work on the ground."

What to do:

Reset your mindset

As Raaval explains in this episode, “*changing mindsets is likely to be a painful process. It’s deep, internal and personal work – unpacking layers of belief and bias that we’ve held, perhaps without realising, throughout our lives. It means confronting the narratives that have been perpetuated by our sector since it began. Yet without doing this deeper work, all other reform efforts that focus on changing practices may fail – much like building a house on poor foundations.*”



The Transforming Partnerships guide emphasised that this is work that both Global North and Global South practitioners need to do:

While the majority of comments from participants focused on Global North mindsets, it was argued that Global South mindsets need to change too, in two interlinked ways. First, some Global South actors have internalised the racism that is embedded in the sector and consider themselves lacking in skills and expertise. Second, and by extension, they sometimes view their communities through the same ‘deficit’ lens as many Global North actors. These mindsets are as important to shift as those of their Global North partners.

So how do we change? Our speakers this episode shared some ideas:

1) Gunjan Veda calls us all to “**think very carefully about where do we continue to promote these colonial practices.**”

2) As Chernor Bah said, “folks in the Global North - white people, frankly - need to have conversations among themselves” about whiteness, power and privilege. As individuals and a collective, we must **reckon with our own biases and challenge prejudiced narratives** in the sector.

3) In the Global South, both speakers advocated for movement building - **sharing trust and collective power to resist neocolonial practices and attitudes.**

4) **Follow the recommendations in the Transforming Partnerships guide**, included on the next 2 pages, to kickstart your mindset reset.

GLOBAL NORTH ACTORS

- **Educate yourself. Analyse your own privilege, prejudices and positionality. Learn about how Global North actors have directly and indirectly imposed their ways of thinking across the international humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors. Recognise where you have built resistance to change.**
 - Take an implicit association test/training from [Harvard's Project Implicit](#) or from the [Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity](#).
 - Dedicate time to reading about racism – look at Harvard Kennedy School's Racial Justice, Racial Equity, and Anti-Racism [Reading List](#).
 - Read: [Time to Decolonise Aid](#) via Peace Direct's website.
 - Watch: 'How to decolonise your mind' with Kehinde Andrews on [YouTube](#).
- **Draft and actively implement a positionality statement for your organisation in consultation with peers and partners of diverse backgrounds.**
 - See the [Equality Institute's guide](#) on how to write one.
 - Read: [Oxfam's commitments](#) to anti-racism, feminism and shifting power in 'Transforming for a radically better world'.
 - Develop a monitoring mechanism to assess progress and promote self-accountability periodically.
- **Explore your organisational history by commissioning research into aspects of your past work, including the sources of your wealth, which may have been based on exploitation, harm or injustices.**
 - For example, see the Joseph Rowntree Trust's [statement](#) on the origins of their endowment.
 - See also the [Guardian's series](#) exploring the paper's connections with slavery.
- **Explore how structural racism and neo-colonial attitudes may continue to shape your organisation's ways of working by conducting an independent review or audit of your organisational culture through a racial equity lens.**

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

- **Encourage an internal culture of openness to critique by encouraging Senior Leadership to hold difficult conversations about racism and power imbalances both internally and externally.**
 - Take a look at Bond's Anti-racism and Decolonising [toolkit](#).
 - Ensure that staff from across all levels and across intersecting identities are heard and listened to.
 - Develop your practice around admitting mistakes internally and externally and sharing how you are trying to address them. For example, see Médecins Sans Frontières' [report](#): 'Tackling institutional discrimination and racism within MSF'.
 - Watch: 'How to become an inclusive leader' with Meagan Pollock on [YouTube](#).
 - Read: '[Mediating the power imbalances of development: a paradox for partnership brokers](#)' by Soli Middleby.
 - Read: '[Reinforcing or Transforming? How partnership brokering should, and can, support decolonization of aid](#)' by Annie Solomon.
 - Read: '[Who pays the piper? A synthesis of decolonizing aid conversations](#)' from the Global Fund for Community Foundations.
 - Read: [White Saviorism in International Development: Theories, Practices and Lived Experiences](#) by Themrise Khan, Kanakulya Dickson and Maika Sondarjee.

Building block 1



JOINT PRACTICES

- Explore together, through a facilitated conversation, differences and similarities in ideologies and motivations underpinning concepts such as 'development'. By promoting mutual learning and recognising the value of diverse knowledge systems, you can challenge the notion that expertise solely resides in the Global North.

Changing mindsets and worldviews

GLOBAL SOUTH ACTORS

- **Educate yourself.** Learn how the current international system of cooperation has been influenced by Global North thinking. Examine how Global South organisations may have contributed to this system, involuntarily or voluntarily, and why.
 - Watch: IFRA Nairobi's Interview with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, author of *Decolonising the Mind* on [YouTube](#).
 - Read: *Time to Decolonise Aid* via Peace Direct's website.
 - Read: The reflections of Epili Hau'ofa in 'Our Sea of Islands'.
- **Explore and critically reflect on how structural racism and neo-colonial attitudes may have been internalised by your staff and may continue to shape your ways of working, as well as how you view your community.**
 - Take an Implicit association test/training from Harvard's [Project Implicit](#) or from the [Klwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity](#).
- **Allocate time with your staff to share alternative narratives that challenge dominant discourses and perspectives in international development.**
 - Prioritise and centre your own knowledge systems.
 - For example, see Council of Europe (COE) [Policy Brief](#) on the '10 criteria for the creation of effective alternative narratives on diversity'.
- **Explore, recognise and address traits of racism, ethnic divides and discrimination within your own countries that can sometimes wrongly provide excuses for neo-colonial attitudes and inappropriately justify structural, and cultural racism.**

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

- **Analyse the risks of adopting a submissive position in partnerships with Global North actors and internalising Global North-imposed knowledge systems.**
 - Watch: 'What if we broke the chains of neocolonialism?' with Brittany Malcolm on [YouTube](#).
 - Avoid replicating neo-colonial power dynamics within your own organisation and community, including silencing the voices of marginalised groups and limiting spaces for inclusive decision-making.
 - Read: 'Race, equity, and neo-colonial legacies: Identifying paths forward for principled humanitarian action', on the [Humanitarian Law & Policy Blog](#).
 - Read: 'Mediating the power imbalances of development: a paradox for partnership brokers' by Soti Middleby.
 - Read: 'Reinforcing or Transforming? How partnership brokering should, and can, support decolonization of aid' by Annie Sloman.
 - Read: 'Who pays the piper? A synthesis of decolonizing aid conversations' from the Global Fund for Community Foundations.
 - Read: *White Saviorism in International Development: Theories, Practices and Lived Experiences* by Themrise Khan, Kanakulya Dickson and Maika Sondarjee.

Deep-dive: decolonising your own mind and movement building

In the episode, Gunjan and Chernor shared advice and insights about how to shake off internalised oppression, as well as ways to build a movement to reclaim power.

Gunjan Veda

“believe in your power and ask for it.” For example, **have a partnership charter**: “I, as a local organisation have a right to set my terms, because what I bring is valuable. And if you want to work with me, you have to meet my terms and conditions, right?”

Build trust and collective power: “we are competing with each other for those select few seats, instead of standing together and saying, why do we only have the select few seats, we should have 50% of the seats. It's not a matter of who amongst us, it's a matter of changing the shape of that table. That's what we need to do together. And we need to trust each other to be working for that same agenda. Because not all of us can be in all the spaces.”

Chernor Bah

“we need to have different kinds of conversations ... about how to organise, how do we see ourselves?” “you have to organise, you've got to have your peers and people that think like you... You have to blend together and **share that liberatory thinking** with your peers and agree that no, we're not going to accept this, this is not who we are, we're better than this. And that together, we're gonna hold the line here.” “Once we are able to do that and organise ourselves I think we can actually push back a lot on the sector. We can change a lot in this world... And to then **take a stance together** and be like, Okay, we, this is who we are, we are worthy. And... we're going to say no, and going forward, we're not going to accept this kind of money ”



Transforming Partnerships in International Cooperation

A practical resource for civil society, donors, INGOs and Intermediaries



The guidance and recommendations in this pack are just a snippet of the advice collated from activists across the Global South and North. To learn more, and find more ways to put decolonisation into practice, read the Transforming Partnerships guide in full, via peacedirect.org

